

VZCZCXR09449
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #1703/01 1861501
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 051501Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6355
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001703

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/03/2016

TAGS: PGOV KDEM NI

SUBJECT: PDP RECONCILIATION: TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

REF: LAGOS 935

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for Reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Attempts by President Olusegun Obasanjo and the leadership of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) to reconcile party members throughout Nigeria face serious problems. Incidents across Nigeria indicate that the reconciliation moves have only opened old wounds and created new suspicions among party members already sharply divided during the Third Term debate. In most states visited, the PDP reconciliation team was either snubbed or meetings were terminated abruptly due to lack of consensus. PDP National Chairman Ahmadu Ali narrowly escaped being lynched in his home state when irate PDP members attacked his convoy. Worse still, the two principal actors involved in the crisis -- President Obasanjo and his vice, Atiku Abubakar -- have not made any genuine effort to resolve their differences, confirming fears that the intra-party squabbles may not end soon.

CRUX OF THE MATTER

¶2. (U) The current wrangling within the PDP emanates from the ongoing "cold war" between Obasanjo and Atiku. Previously the two shielded their disagreements from the public, but that ended in April when Atiku openly opposed the plan to extend Obasanjo's tenure through a constitutional amendment. The PDP leadership, handpicked by Obasanjo without regard to party guidelines, has been vocal in its demands of loyalty from the party membership and threatened to "deal with" PDP members who opposed the Third Term amendments. After the defeat of the proposed constitutional amendments, PDP Chairman Ali described the National Assembly as "rascals, amateurs and irresponsible." After it threatened to sanction him, Ali tendered a veiled apology to the Senate. Subsequently President Obasanjo appealed to PDP members to put the rancor and bitterness behind them, leading to power struggles, apathy and mudslinging.

¶3. (C) The emergence of rival factions within the PDP has created another big hole in the party's attempt to patch its problems. One new group (which claims to be the "authentic" PDP) has set up a parallel leadership structure, opened its own headquarters, and rebelled against the Ahmadu Ali executive committee. Police shut down the Abuja headquarters of this faction on June 10. Another faction has also emerged, offering PDP members a "center path" without backing either the President or the Vice President. In the meantime, reconciliation meetings have gone on with problems plaguing

the process in both north and south (Reftel). Still, as one aide to the Vice President said, "the only reconciliation that needs to happen is between Obasanjo and Atiku and they are not talking."

ADAMAWA STATE

¶4. (U) In Adamawa State, home to Vice President Atiku, the PDP remains a divided house. The party is polarized between Atiku loyalists and supporters of President Obasanjo, who are led by former Nigeria's former Ambassador to the U.S. and current Senator Jubril Aminu. When the PDP reconciliation committee in the Northeast, headed by Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyawu, called a meeting, neither Atiku nor Governor Boni Haruna attended and they refused to send representatives. Iwuanyawu and his entourage were shocked when they arrived in Yola Airport on June 4 and there were no state government representatives to welcome them. When the team eventually drove to the Government House to pay the traditional courtesy call on Governor Haruna (as previously arranged), the governor was out of town. It was more baffling when they discovered that Vice President Atiku was at his official residence in Abuja instead of in Yola. When Iwuanyawu and his team finally met with Atiku in Abuja, the Vice President welcomed them to his office but refused to cooperate with the committee. A frustrated Iwuanyawu later told press that "reconciliation between President Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku is a precondition to current reconciliation efforts in the PDP."

ABUJA 00001703 002 OF 003

KATSINA STATE

¶5. (C) An intense battle over the 2007 gubernatorial race has led to the emergence of 3 different camps in the Katsina PDP, making reconciliation a mission impossible. The first group is led by Governor Umaru Musa Yar'adua, who is working assiduously to hand-pick his successor. Speaker of the House of Representatives Aminu Masari leads the second camp. Masari wants to be governor of Katsina in 2007, but Governor Yar'adua and the Presidency are strongly opposed to his ambition because he was ambivalent during the Third Term debate. (Reportedly Governor Yar'adua actively supported the Third Term plan because Obasanjo promised to nominate him as Vice President.) Ambassador Magaji Mohammed, who recently resigned as minister of Internal Affairs to pursue his bid for governorship, is the leader of the third camp. When the PDP peacemakers came to Katsina none of these groups agreed to work with the others. Other important players, including PDP founding member Alhaji Lawal Kaita, have joined the ACD. Efforts to persuade them to rejoin the PDP have been unsuccessful, and instead, these former PDP kingmakers and grassroots politicians have been spewing venomous remarks at Obasanjo, his government, and current PDP leadership.

PLATEAU STATE

¶6. (C) A member of the PDP reconciliation team that visited Jos, capital of Plateau State summarized his findings: "It was a tough experience. Most of the PDP bigwigs in the state have decamped to ACD. Although some of them attended the meetings, there was nothing reconciliatory about their tone. They all came to bash and vilify PDP leadership, the Presidency and Deputy Senate President Ibrahim Mantu. There was no remorse in their presentations." The interlocutor said the angry PDP members complained that Ahmadu Ali was not elected by party members and therefore did not even have the mandate to direct affairs in the party. They also attacked

President Obasanjo for recognizing only "Abuja politicians" like Mantu who "do not have home-based support." Big political players like Solomon Lar refused give the committee an audience and the hostile atmosphere in Jos was palpable during their visit. "There were places we declined to visit for security reasons," the committee member said.

OTHERS

¶ 7. (C) The situation is similar in other states. In Benue, Imo, Delta and Kogi states, apart from shunning all reconciliatory meetings, angry PDP members called for the immediate dissolution of Ali-led PDP leadership as a first step towards reconciliation. Ali was so disturbed by the reports he received from Delta State that he has constituted a four-man panel to investigate Governor James Ibori's "anti-party activities" with the view to take appropriate action against him. In Kogi State, reports said Ali's convoy barely escaped an attempt to kill him by a faction of the PDP in the state. Last year, Governor Ibrahim Idris had to escape through an emergency exit door at the Lokoja Township Stadium when suspected party thugs forced themselves into the venue while he was reading a speech and attacked government officials with guns, knives and machetes.

¶ 8. (C) The emergence of factions in the PDP and the animosity towards its current leadership is giving anxious moments to the PDP leadership, according to a PDP insider. He suggested that since President Obasanjo is trying to stop the Vice President's political ambitions, the Vice President has decided to use the factions to "destroy Obasanjo's political base by creating problems in the PDP." An early June meeting between the party's leadership, its governors and Board of Trustees members demonstrated the difficulties the party faces. Billed as "a blueprint for recapturing power" in 2007, only 8 of 28 PDP governors attended the meeting and the Vice President and his associates boycotted the meeting. A founding member of the party expressed fears that if this bickering lingers on "there is no way our party will win elections in 2007."

COMMENT

¶ 9. (C) The third term controversy has opened old wounds in the PDP. While the President, through his handpicked party officials, still controls the PDP structure, important backers of the alliance that formed the PDP are either

ABUJA 00001703 003 OF 003

struggling for the Chairman's removal or preparing to back new parties. Even while PDP is coming apart at the seams, though, Obasanjo's control of INEC ensures that Ali will remain in control of the tattered remains of the party regardless of the outstanding court orders and the demands from the membership for a change of leadership. Much like the PDP, the rest of the political landscape in Nigeria remains in turmoil. How the parties realign themselves for the 2007 elections is unclear even to most of Nigeria's most astute political pundits.

FUREY